



A Little off the Top, Please

by LCdr. Bill Halverson


It was one of those days working on the flight deck when you knew something was about to happen. We had been in the Gulf for several months, baking in the summer heat. The crew was tired and a little complacent.

I was working the bow cats during a twilight launch, and we were about to launch the COD from cat 2. Final checkers were doing their thing, and time was approaching to signal the pilots to spread the wings.

Aft on cat 3, my fellow catapult officer was in the process of launching a Tomcat. If you haven't had the privilege of launching a few tons of roaring steel down the flight deck, you need to know about a couple precautions aimed at making sure all goes well. The first is that we don't launch anything from cat 3 if we are launching a COD from cat 2. The clearance just isn't there—you're liable to bump wings. The second is our ace in the hole—the "suspend" call. It was about to come in mighty handy.

We were about to spread the wings of the COD, on the bow cat, and launch it. I walked in front of the COD to check clearance for the waist shooter and noticed the final checks were complete. The jet was in tension and about 15 seconds from launching.

On the bow, the cat 2 director gave the COD crew the spread signal. The wings of the COD were cycling out and then I saw the shooter was just about to launch the Tomcat on the waist. At the last second, I gave the suspend call to the yellowshirt to stop the wingspread of the COD. The boss heard my call to the yellowshirt and suspended the launch on the waist. We averted catastrophe by only seconds.

Some Tomcat driver and his RIO don't know how close they came to getting a very close—and permanent—haircut that day. 

LCdr. Halverson now flies the SH-60F and HH-60H with HS-2.